



News Release

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Note: This document has been revised to correct a factual error

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Tuberculosis in Washington: more cases and getting harder to treat

Tuberculosis kills more people globally than any other infectious disease

OLYMPIA – Washington's [tuberculosis \(TB\)](#) cases were on the rise last year, putting state and local public health officials on heightened alert. During 2015, the state's TB rate rose by seven percent from the previous year. Across the globe, TB now kills more people each year than any other infectious disease, surpassing HIV/AIDS as the leading cause of infectious disease death worldwide.

Each year nearly 10 million people become ill with TB and 1.5 million die from the disease. About one- third of the world's population has latent TB, which means people have been infected by TB bacteria but are not yet ill with the disease and cannot spread the disease to others. Last year, 208 cases of [TB disease were reported in Washington](#), an increase from the 194 cases reported in 2014. The current rate of TB in our state finds that about 3 of every 100,000 Washingtonians develop TB disease, which is about the same as the national average; however, some communities have rates significantly higher than the national average. To eliminate the deadly disease in our state, prevention and treatment efforts must be tailored to address the diversity of affected populations.

TB is easily treated when detected in its early stage –called latent TB infection (LTBI). When LTBI develops into TB disease it's more complex and serious.

March 24 is World TB Day – a day set aside to share solutions and discuss issues related to this deadly disease. The Washington State Department of Health invites the public to attend a free World TB Day event at the Seattle Public Library on Thursday, March 24 from 5:30-7:45 p.m. This event features experts speaking about the global effect of TB, how TB impacts local

communities, and obstacles facing patients with TB. Several local organizations will be on-site to share their work in the fight against TB.

“I’m concerned about the future of tuberculosis in Washington State,” says Washington’s Communicable Disease Epidemiologist Dr. Scott Lindquist. “Cases are becoming more complicated, requiring greater resources and skills in a time of decreased funding and increased global drug resistance.”

TB bacteria spreads through the air when someone with the illness coughs, sneezes, or speaks and someone else breathes in the bacteria. TB infection usually affects the lungs, however TB can attack other parts of the body. TB symptoms may include fever, night sweats, fatigue, weight loss, and a persistent cough. Some people may be infected with the disease and have no symptoms. Timely treatment with proper antibiotics is vital to surviving the disease, lessening the severity of symptoms, and preventing the spread of TB. People with immature or weakened immune systems – such as young children, the elderly, and people with certain health conditions such as diabetes, organ transplantation, and HIV or AIDS – are at increased risk of the disease, if infected.

The counties with the most TB cases in 2015 were King (98), Snohomish (30), Pierce (16), and Yakima (12).

Drug-resistant TB (TB that is not cured by standard medications) is a serious public health threat globally. This variation requires longer treatment periods with drugs that are more expensive. Recently, the federal government issued a ‘National Action Plan for Combating Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis,’ urging states to strengthen their capacity to treat and detect drug-resistant TB.

In 2015, 21 cases reported to the Washington State Department of Health, were resistant to one or more drugs currently used as a “first line of treatment” for TB; four were multi-drug resistant. TB rates are often higher among racial and ethnic groups. In 2015, 76 percent of cases in the state were in people born outside the U.S. or its territories. In 2015, 49 percent of all cases in Washington were among Asians, followed by Blacks (17 percent), Hispanics (14 percent), and Whites (10 percent).

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The overall TB crisis continues to increase, particularly as drug-resistant cases rise globally.

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While considerable work has been done to prevent the spread of TB, fighting it is a long-term commitment that must be met by the public health and health care communities.

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